KEY TO ORIGINAL GOSPELS

GEORGE M. LAMSA

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GEORGE M. LAMSA

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Key to Original Gospels

PREFACE

My experience in learning many foreign languages, dialects and technical usages of certain words and phrases led me to discover the difficulties which the early Gospel translators faced in their great task. In this little book it is impossible to attempt to touch upon the mass of material which the scholars have accumulated in the last fifty years of the textual criticism. I am merely writing on the subject from the Semitic point of view and the background of the social customs under which Jesus was born and reared and from the language He spoke. It is through the insight of these customs under which I grew up, and the Aramaic language which I speak that I am able to understand some of the difficulties in the Gospels.

Moreover, I am trying in a small way to reveal the Semitic side of the study of the Gospels with prayer, and hope to throw some

light on some difficult, obscure and debated questions which the Western scholars have not been able to understand. Also to state from the Eastern traditions, handed down to us by our forefathers, how the scriptures originated and descended to us.

I hope this will be the beginning of a large work which may be undertaken in the near future for the study of Eastern Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

Within the last fifty years of scientific and religious research, considerable light has been thrown on the Biblical history and much has been written and said concerning the Gospels. The archaeological discoveries in Mesopotamia and the Holy Land have not only contributed generously to our present Biblical knowledge, but have also stimulated the interest for further investigations. Both scholars and laymen are anxiously waiting for new sacred material which may be unearthed from the ruins of ancient cities.

Today the physical barrier which had for centuries secluded the East from the eyes of the Westerners has been conquered, but the mental barrier is still to be explored. Let us, then, agree that the Westerner knows well the geography and the history of the East. But he understands very little of the inner

meaning of the mysterious life and customs of the Easterner. He knows little of how an Easterner thinks, speaks and writes. Therefore, the results of scholarly research during the past half century have been partially guess work, with disagreement strongly prevailing. This is because there is a period of more than 1800 years filled with unsurmountable difficulties between the present age and the age in which the Gospels originated. Rapid changes in customs and manners in the West have added to these difficulties and retarded the work.

Nevertheless the students of today are ready to give the subject of the Gospels a new synthesis based on the new finding made on the ground where Christianity originated. At the present there are movements within Catholic and Protestant Churches for a careful revision of the scriptures.

It is likely that this work will be done by Westerners who see the historical and archae-

ological findings through the eyes of a foreigner unfamiliar with the intimate details of language and customs of the countries in which the Gospels originated. If this work is done by Westerners the Gospels will still remain a problem to be solved.

Not until an Easterner, a native of a land where Aramaic is spoken, one who has been brought up according to the customs and manners which were in use in the time when the Gospels were written, undertakes the task will the mysterious secrets of the Gospels be unveiled. Even if such a man attempts to revise the scriptures, he must not only know English but should have a person assisting him who has a good knowledge of the English, a real appreciation of the spirit of the Gospels, and who believes in the divinity of Jesus.

It is true that astronomers know a great deal about the constituents, temperature and other elements in Mars. But if we should happen to find a survey of Mars by a Martian,

we would find that we know little about the planets.

Moreover, the research work done on the New Testament has been only carried on by European and American scholars, based on the understanding of Christianity in Europe and the legendary traditions there.

Christianity in the East, since the rise of Islam, suffered many persecutions. The number of Christians declined rapidly, writers literally disappeared and the most sacred books were burned or buried in the mountains. Thus the Easterners, while struggling to defend Christianity, were forced to abandon their literary work on the scriptures. It was during this period that the Christians in the West tried to wrestle the leadership from the East. Rome replaced Jerusalem as a see of Christendom. Greek and Latin languages became official languages of the Church in the West. This resulted in the reformation. Since then, the scriptures in Europe have

undergone many changes. There are difficulties which have been wrought up through the translation of one language into another. There have been revisions and modifications thus resulting in the omission of certain words and the addition of others. While in the East no attempt has ever been made to revise or change one word of the original scriptures, as such a deed would be considered sacrilegious. Neither have the Easterners printed editions of their Gospels. Nor do the ancient Christians of the Assyrian Church accept printed translations made by Europeans. This is not because there is no need for the propagation of the Gospels but because of the fear of changes, which might result.

THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS

Jesus and His disciples only spoke Aramaic and preached to simple and poor people who could understand them. Latin was spoken by Roman officials and Jews who were attached to the court of the Roman Governor. Greek was understood by a few cultured business men and merchants. The masses spoke Aramaic. Even Jewish writings, prior to this time, such as sacred biblical literature, were found in Aramaic. The Hebrew scriptures were interpreted by the priests and lawyers in Aramaic. Centuries after the Christian Era we still find Jewish writings, such as the Talmud and Mishna in Aramaic.

Indeed the Jews despised both the Greeks and the Romans. The racial antipathy was so bitter because both Romans and Greeks were non-semites and their customs and religions too alien to those of the Jews. The Greeks

had conquered them and massacred many of their numbers. The marks of suffering which the Jews had borne during the Greek period were still to be seen. The Romans were just beginning to subjugate them.

On the other hand, early Christianity was nothing more than perfected Judaism, inspired with Jewish traditions and hopes. As long as Christianity remained a Jewish movement, thus appealing to the Jewish racial aspirations and Jewish thought, the Jews continued to champion its cause. In the second century A. D. the Jews saw that Pagan customs, Greek and Egyptian traditions and religious commercialism were creeping into Christianity. Doctrines and dogmas were replacing the teaching of Jesus and those of the Prophets, and there was danger of Jewish amalgamation with Gentiles. Therefore the Jews dropped their interest, and took no more part in what was then known as a Gentile movement.

Both Greeks and Romans were brought into the fold of Christianity by the Jewish and Syrian missionaries when the Christian Church became strong in Judea and Syria. Therefore, the original Gospels were written only for the Jews and in the language of the Jewish people and the Syrians who spoke Aramaic. The style of writing, the manner of speech and composition are purely Aramaic and not easily translated into other languages. It is not so with the Epistles of St. Paul. There, I find Aramaic thought and manner of speech dictated into Greek.

In order to illustrate this point more clearly, I will take for example the Armenian and Assyrian races, both conquered by the Turks, and who, for nearly six hundred years passed through experiences and persecutions alike to those of the Jews. Neither of these two races lost their language nor did they encourage the Turkish language, either in business or in the home. They never wrote books in

Turkish, especially sacred literature, which the Easterners believed would be defiled if written in the language of a conquering race which had oppressed its people. On the other hand, the Greek conquest of Palestine did not last very long. The Jews continuously fought Greek domination and finally succeeded in gaining their independence under the Maccabean kings. During this period the Jews persistently retained their institutions, customs and language.

Another illustration is that of Christian Science. Mrs. Baker Eddy being born in America spoke English, and preached in English to English-speaking people. At the outset her teachings were condemned. Who cared to translate her writings into other languages? Who thought anything about it but the sick and who were then known as lunatics? Who believed this sect would attain such dramatic success? For many years Christian

Science writings were only printed in English.

Now let us suppose that all English texts of "Science and Health" in the United States and England were burned, and a new translation made from Chinese into English, we would still have no grounds to doubt that the original texts of Mrs. Eddy's "Science and Health" might be discovered in Australia, nor could we think that her works were originally written in Chinese, even though we had in our possession a translation from Chinese which was being used in common. Yet a translation of her work from Chinese into English would greatly differ from the original text.

The chief difficulties which the Westerner confronts in his studies of the Gospels are the arrangement of the early writings—the writers and the language in which the writers thought, wrote and spoke. The documentary evidences which would solve most of these mysteries have perished, buried or lost, and

the legendary information on which most of the textual criticism is built creates confusion. Therefore I believe the only way to penetrate these long and obscure centuries between the present advanced age in which we live and the simple age in which the Gospels were written is to explore virgin Eastern sources and to study Christianity from the Eastern point of view. We must also try to trace back into the language Jesus spoke some of His sayings and understand them in the light they were written. Then translate them through our modern thought into English.

Indeed scholarship has contributed generously through the discoveries of ancient peoples, tablets, and relics which enlighten us and help us to understand the past and left the way open for us to do the rest. On the other hand, the missions have made their greatest contribution towards scholarship by producing native scholars who not only

understand the background and the language which Jesus and His Apostles spoke, but who also read, write and speak English.

Thus, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the original Gospels we have to study the development of Christianity in the Eastern Empire (Persia), and the fragmentary portions of the early Christian Church in the East which have survived persecutions and the rapid changes and modifications under successive dynasties.

Take for example, the Assyrian Church, founded in the early part of the First Century A. D., and for many centuries the strongest branch of the Christian Church in the East and in fact, in the world. At present still using the Aramaic language and maintaining the early apostolic customs in practice and worship. In that part of the world we still live under an older civilization, a civilization from which Christian religion and its culture sprang. Our marital customs are the same

as they were during the time of Jacob. We still pay a dower to the father of the bride, either in money, oxen or sheep. We still thrash wheat with oxen with their mouths tied. Two women, one young and one old, sit down grinding the wheat. We still use sheepskins for wine bottles, anoint with sacred oil, believe in the angelic visitation, see visions, sacrifice in high places and still practice Mosaic law. Our houses are built the same style as those of our ancestors who lived before Jesus. Our food and wearing apparel have never changed. Indeed in Assyria, time does not exist. When we think of Abraham and Moses, it looks as if they died but a month ago. Jesus seemed to have lived but a short while ago. These customs which seem to look so strange and ancient to an American, if discussed fully and studied carefully will obviously have a very strong influence on the fundamental structure and interpretation of the Gospels.

THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS

All the teachings of Jesus and His parables are illustrated only by the life and customs which were once in use in Northern Palestine but now only kept by the Assyrians. Jesus never went to Greece, India or Egypt. He said nothing about the customs of those countries, and there is nothing to indicate that He was anywhere outside of Palestine.

ARAMAIC PHRASEOLOGY

The Aramaic language is simple in its manner of speech, but hard and peculiar in its expressions. Often a word is used which has many different meanings. Whereas Greek and Latin have many words to describe one thing. Moreover, there are idioms in Aramaic that can never be translated accurately into another language.

Aramaic conversation is strange. The speech is amplified as far as imagination can reach, in order to convey the thought; the object is magnified to many times its size in order to make persons see all its sides. In this way, the speech becomes persuasive and the power which radiates from its magnetic force shatters the doubts in the minds of listeners. Objects change; values increase and decrease; the harm which the glance of an eye to the body of a woman can cause is worse than the loss of an eye. In order to do this, facts

become exaggerated: for example, Saul and David instead of killing a few hundred men, we say, they killed tens of thousands. A small army of fifty thousand is increased numerically, as the sands on the shores of the seas and the stars in the skies.

The Aramaic language has another method of conversation, which is used generally.

"If you can build that house in two months, I will kill myself." This means—the task can never be accomplished.

"If you can buy this pair of shoes for less than two dollars, I will change myself into a donkey." This means—that the shoes cannot be bought for less.

"If you marry that woman, I will cut off my right arm." This means—it is an impossibility.

"If I don't tell the truth, you can pluck out my eye." This means—what I say is true.

"If I married that beautiful girl, I would never die." This means—the happiness of

the marriage eliminates the thought of the death.

"We have eaten the flesh and drunk the blood of our fathers while building this house." This means, I have worked very hard to build this house.

"While doing this work I saw my dead people before my eyes." It means the task was almost impossible.

"I have eaten the flesh of my dead people." It means I have done hard work.

"I am going away, please do not cut your eyes from my wife and children." This means, take care of them while I am away.

"Your eyes are not carrying a burden." This means, you are jealous.

"My boy is sick because he has been hit by a woman's eye." This means, that a woman had envied the child.

"Abraham has given birth to many sheep, oxen and donkeys because God has blessed him." This means, Abraham has been blessed

by God, his sheep, oxen and donkeys have been increased.

"God holds you." This means God condemns you.

"Do not hurt that man, he is a man of God." It means he is a meek man.

"I and my father are one." This means that my father and I agree.

"Hold that highway in your hand until you come to the city." This means, that street will take you to the city.

"They laid hands on them." This means, they were detained and also means they were ordained.

"My heart is aching." This means, I have stomach trouble.

ARAMAIC IN PALESTINE

In the Seventh Century B. C., Esarhaddon, Assyrian Emperor, carried the ten tribes of Israel captive to Assyria and replaced them by a mixed Assyrian population which rehabilitated Samaria and Galilee and the Assyrian dialect of the Northern Aramaic became the language of Galilee.* These Assyrians worshipped Jehovah, God of Israel, but the Jews always looked upon them as foreigners. Nothing could provoke the indignation of the Jews more than a Galilean aspiring to sit on the promised throne of David.

"For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them;

"Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So

* Hebrew is a branch of Aramaic, known as Western Aramaic. Abraham was an Assyrian. Isaac and Jacob married from Assyria and eleven of the sons of Jacob were born at the house of his uncle in Padanaram.

was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

"And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ave, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof."

II Kings 17-25.

"Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel;

"Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

"But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God, but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus of Persia hath commanded us."

Ezra 4: 1-4.

ARAMAIC IN PALESTINE

Prior to the conquest of Judea by Nebuchadnezzar the Assyrian influence was spread all over Palestine, Judah became a tributary and the Assyrian language was spoken by princes and noblemen.

"Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.

"How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?

"Am I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.

"Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Aramaic language; for we understand it: and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall."

II Kings 18: 23-27.

About 480 B. C., Nebuchadnezzer, King of Chaldeans, carried Judah captive to Babylon. When they had forgotten Hebrew, the Chaldean dialect, or Southern Aramaic, became their daily language. Apparently there are some peculiarities and differences in the phraseology and manner of speech in these two dialects even today. This is why the Jews in Jerusalem who spoke Southern Aramaic could not understand some of the parables and sayings which Jesus used in His Galilean or Northern Aramaic speech.

During the exile and the post-exile, Jewish sacred writings were in Aramaic. In the Third Century B. C., the Old Testament was translated into Greek, because the Alexandrian Jews could not understand Aramaic. This was done simply to facilitate the study of the scriptures among the Jews in Egypt where the Greek language predominated. But the Jews in Palestine, Mesopotamia and Persia confined their writings to Aramaic. An old

Jewish colony in the Province of Aderbajan, Persia, still speaks and uses Aramaic. There are also other isolated Jewish settlements in Kurdistan and Turkey which are remnants of the Captivity, and who still speak and read Aramaic.

AUTHORS

There is little historical evidence at our disposal to establish the identity of the authors of our Gospels, but we know that all the writers whoever they might have been were Jews and had been with Jesus.

The authors of the Gospels omitted their names from the documents they wrote just to hide their identity. The Government and ecclesiastical authorities would have done their utmost to arrest them and try them for treason, if they had been apprehended. Peter* began his epistle with his name because he was writing from Babylon and Babylon was in the Parthian-Persian Empire.

There is every reason to believe that the first writer of the Gospels was Matthew who

* The general public belief has always been that Peter lived in the East and died in Babylon. The patriarch of the East had assumed the title "Mar-Shimun (St. Peter) long before the bishop of Rome was recognized as head of the Church in the West.

was a Publican. In the East the qualification for the office of Publican is that he must read and write. A bishop and a priest do not necessarily have to know how to read and write. Other disciples were illiterate, recruited from the ranks of fishermen and farmers. No other man who had not seen and heard Jesus could have quoted His sayings so accurately. Therefore, there is every indication that the writer is one who had been with Jesus and who knew how to write. Matthew wrote in Aramaic, the language of his people. Mark, Luke and John were also originally written in Aramaic.

Matthew wrote to the people who had seen and known Jesus. His material was confined to what he heard, saw and understood. Other Gospels were copied from Matthew, with supplementary information which the copyist had gathered from those who had known Jesus and heard about Him, and which Matthew had not considered very important. Even these latter accounts were in the com-

mon language which the people spoke. This was necessary as the first missionary work of the Church was among the Aramaic-speaking people. For years prior to the conversion of St. Paul, the Apostles preached to races whose language they understood and whose customs were similar to those of their own.

SAYINGS OF JESUS

It was years after the Resurrection that the public began to inquire into the life and works of Jesus. The simple oral narrative which hitherto had been carried secretly from mouth to mouth spread very rapidly. Men and women quoted some of Jesus' sayings, and at times invoked His divine power. The demand for information concerning His life and teachings greatly increased.

At the outset a scribe supplied the public need with sayings of Jesus, written on parchment scrolls. The sacred writings which these scrolls contained were used for healing and protection from evil spirits. Indeed the public did not care for what the writer himself thought about Jesus. What they wanted was only what Jesus said.

Evidently, the early simple people were not looking for a critical commentary to find out whether Jesus was the Son of God or not, or

to question His teachings. They wanted to treasure in their hearts, the divine and comforting words of their master. The words which had healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, cleansed the leper and proclaimed tidings of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. What else did they want? All these early followers of Jesus believed in His divine power and accepted Him as the promised Messiah.

On the other hand, the writer did not care to write a complete biography of their Master as most of these people who wanted to possess the sacred writings had seen Jesus and known a great deal about Him.

The next generation began to inquire when, where, why and how Jesus did certain things. They had not seen Him and some of them wanted a stronger proof of His life than the mere writing of the scrolls which they read. Therefore, a new field of inquiry was opened. This time the public wanted a biography of

Jesus. They wanted in writing something which the first writer had not considered very important and the first Christians had not considered wise to be incorporated in the Holy Sayings of their beloved Lord.

It is this later material which makes our present Gospels differ. Each writer seems to have copied Matthew's original work of the sayings of Christ with supplementary information which he had collected from men and women who had learned about Jesus from their parents. This is why one writer traces the genealogy of Jesus back to David by the way of Solomon. The other goes back to Adam through Nathan, son of David.

It is amazing to think that some of these later writers seem to know more about Jesus than He did Himself. Jesus did not seem to have known anything concerning this kingly ancestry. He never spoke a word about it. He never even said of what tribe of Israel He was from. He heard Pharisees and

priests denouncing Him and repudiating His Messianic claims on the grounds that He was not from the House of David and that he was not born in Bethlehem. According to the Jewish tradition which strongly prevailed at the time of Jesus, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem and to be a descendant from the House of David.

"But many of the people who heard his words then said: Truly he is the Prophet.

"Has not the scripture said that from the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the town of David, Christ shall come? Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, shall Christ come out of Galilee?"

St. John 7: 40-43.

"Nicodemus saith unto them (one of them he that came to Jesus by night),

"Doth our law convict man, before it hear him, and know what he had done?

"They answered and said unto him, why art you also of Galilee? Search, and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

St. John 7: 50-53.

Moreover, Jesus heard people calling Him Samaritan but he never tried to contradict His enemies and to prove He was from the line of David. Instead he challenged the Jewish literal ecclesiastical opinion that Christ was to be a descendant from the line of David.

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

"And he said, What do you say concerning Christ? whose son is he? They said unto him, The son of David.

*"He said unto them, How then does David in *spirit call him Lord, because he said,*

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

"If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?"

St. Matthew 22: 41-46.

Here Jesus tried to show the Jews that they understood the scriptures; literally that Christ was not limited to any particular house or tribe, but that He could come from any tribe.

* Spirit here means prophetically.

Apparently the disciples of Jesus who wrote the early documents knew that their Lord was rejected by the Jews because He was a Galilean and not a descendant of David. They heard Him debating this question and silenced His enemies. How could they have written the portions of our scriptures which accord to Jesus this distinctive Jewish Messianic claim?

This is what happened. The generation which had seen and known Jesus had passed away, His disciples, as well as His enemies also had died. The Jewish authorities had not written anything concerning Jesus because in their eyes He died on the cross. Therefore he was the accursed one. These writers were free to incorporate into the early writings the new material which they collected.

Therefore in order to find the connecting link to the original Gospels and to throw further light on the Gospel's history, we must

look back through a long period of years in order to study varied documents and systems of copying work employed at times when scholarship and accuracy were least known, when each writer had his own method of spelling and when there were no grammarians; when writers were few, writing materials scarce, books rare and limited only to congregations and rich families who could well afford to possess such sacred material. At that time there was vigorous zeal displayed by the missionaries and followers of Jesus for expansion of Christianity, but little technique and less discipline and uniformity.

Moreover, we must also remember that at that time there were no scholars, no bishops nor popes to control the thought and suppress the writings. The main object of the Church in the East and West was to convert the Pagan world. Therefore for many centuries the Gospels were not compiled, and varied Syriac (Aramaic) texts were in use.

EASTERN VERSIONS

The Eastern Church in Persia had its own versions of the Gospels in Syro-Chaldean Aramaic. They were brought into the East during the first century A.D. by the Apostle *Addai and other disciples. These early documents were used by the church in Persia many years before Marcian and Tatian were born. The versions in common use in the East later were called "Peshitta and Mkabalta" which means, the common (simple), and the accepted one. "Peshitta" contains only twenty-two books, as the Book of Revelation and a number of other epistles were not accepted in the East until later on. A part of the ancient Assyrian liturgy known as "Kodasha" of the Apostles and the oldest liturgy in the world uses the early Syriac versions. Moreover, these versions differ extensively from those of the West. It is important to

*Addai was one of the seventy who went out preaching.

note that the Mohammedans only accept these Eastern Gospels as authentic and charge that the Western texts were forged. Therefore when a Christian takes oath by the Gospel it is required that the book of "Engel" be one of the Eastern versions. Greek was never spoken in Mesopotamia and Persia, while Aramaic dominated in Syria and Palestine. Thus the change of the Gospels from Aramaic into Syro-Chaldean was an easy task. The work was very simple because there was no need for translation as the meaning of words in either language was the same. The writer only had to change the Hebrew characters into another style of slightly modified letters, known as Syriac.

EARLY TRANSLATIONS

Christianity from its early start spread into the two powerful and rival Empires, Persia and Rome. These two great powers for centuries were engaged in warfare. It is highly important to note that Christians in the Roman Empire passed through ten major and severe persecutions which lasted for nearly 300 years and at times threatened to almost obliterate the Church.

The Christian property was confiscated and Christians looked upon as traitors to the Empire. Moreover, the mental energy of Christian leaders was absorbed by the thought to save Christianity. Doctrines, dogmas and sacred writings occupied little thought or none at all.

In the Persian Empire the state of affairs was different; for more than three centuries persecutions were unknown. Instead, Persia had become a refuge place for Christians who

because of their faith were driven and banished from the Roman Empire.

When Constantine championed the cause of Christians and he, himself, became a convert, Persian policy toward Christianity in the East was suddenly changed. The Christians whom hitherto Persia had pitied, came to be looked upon as friends and spies of Rome. Assuredly, the three centuries of peace gave Eastern Christians time and opportunity to contribute much towards the development of the scriptures; to organize the Church and to establish Theological Schools. Tatian, the Assyrian, made a new "Diatesaron" version of the Gospels; later St. Ephrim wrote a commentary on the scriptures. Whereas, in the Roman Empire the conditions were different and the task of Christians hard. During all this period of peace and tranquillity in Persia, in the Roman Empire Christians were put to death, books and Churches destroyed and burned, Christian gatherings disbanded. The

Christians in the West had no time to devote to scholarly research and writing. They had to be content with what survived the destruction. They had to copy the Gospels again and again hastily and, at times, from incomplete and damaged manuscripts.

After the expansion of Christianity among Semites, the Greeks were the first non-Semites to be converted. Therefore, the Greek translation of the Gospels was the first made from the original language. In all of the Greek and Latin versions we find that the early translators had left some of the Aramaic words untranslated. It seems likely that the translators did not agree on the meaning of certain Aramaic words. As some of these words remained in the original Aramaic, they have a double meaning.

For example: "Talita Komey," which means, "O, thou who sleepest arise" and "Little girl arise." The word "talita" means both little girl and sleep.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

"But the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way, while Mary his mother was 'Makhirta' (bought for a price) for Joseph, before he knew her, she was found pregnant through the holy spirit. But Joseph, her husband, was a quiet man and did not let it be known, thinking to divorce her secretly. While he was meditating over this the angel of God appeared to him in a dream and said unto him: Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take your wife Mary."*

St. Matthew 1: 18.
(Literal translation from the Eastern version)

Among the people who still live according to the ancient customs and are governed by unwritten laws, a marriage contract is not binding until the price for the girl is paid in full. The wedding follows soon after payment of the price, as in the East, courtship with prospective brides is unknown. An engagement is simply an informal announce-

* A man who feared God.

ment which the bridegroom's parents make. Therefore the verbal agreement is temporary and not binding to either party. Thus before the dower is paid the sole jurisdiction over the prospective bride is that of her parents. Jacob had no money or cattle to pay for his wives so he had to work fourteen years for his Uncle Laban in order to marry two of his uncle's daughters.

When the price of a bride is paid, she becomes automatically responsible only to her husband whenever her conduct and chastity are questioned. Her parents no longer have anything to say. There is one exception, which is so unusual and has been kept so sacred in the marital customs, and that is, that when a young girl who is under age is given in marriage, a verbal agreement is entered into between the parents of the parties concerned, especially when the bridegroom is a widower of an older age, or one who has more than one wife, the bridegroom

should respect his newly wedded wife until she arrives at the age of maturity. In the East the marriageable age for girls is 12, but many girls, for various reasons, are given in marriage at the age of 7. The little bride dresses as a married woman. She performs her duty as a wife in all household affairs, and sleeps with her husband. But she is not consumed until she reaches the age of twelve. When the bride becomes a full-fledged wife her virginity is witnessed by two elderly women, and the token of her purity is kept.

"Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate:

"And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her;"

Deut. 22: 15, 16.

From a study of the Eastern text of the Gospels and the Aramaic social customs, we

see that Joseph and Mary were married. That is to say that Joseph had paid the price by which a husband becomes sole owner of his wife. But it seems very likely that Joseph had married a girl who was under age, while he was a middle-aged man. Mary is found pregnant through the Holy Spirit, and Joseph thinks that she committed adultery. Joseph was a God-fearing man. He tried to obtain a decree of divorce without letting the public know. To divorce her secretly—that is, to ask Mary's parents to return the dowry, on the grounds that their daughter was not a virgin, and then procure an annulment on some other grounds less criminal than adultery. According to the Jewish moral code, the punishment for adultery is death. The woman is stoned and the first stones are thrown by her own relatives.

"If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man finds her in the city, and lie with her;

"Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

"If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found;

"Then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days."

Deut 22: 23, 24, 28, 29.

Therefore, if Mary was only betrothed, Joseph would have not known anything concerning her secret affairs; he would have had nothing to do with her affairs and there would have been no reason for divorce. It would have been for Mary's parents and the town to punish her. On the other hand, if Mary was not married she could not have escaped the severe punishment. No one

would have believed that she had angelic visitations.

It is also of interest that according to Jewish law no illegitimate child could be brought to the temple and presented to God. Therefore if there had been the slightest suspicion of the legitimacy of Jesus His mother could not have presented Him at the temple.

TRIED OUT

"Then was Jesus carried away by the holy Spirit into the wilderness, to be tried out by the adversary."

St. Matthew 4: 1.
(Literal translation)

The word "dnethnasey" in this case means to be tried out. When an Easterner purchased an ox or a horse, he tried it out for a number of days.

Jesus was full of zeal and enthusiasm, but at the same time was confronting opposition from His relatives, friends and enemies. His interpretation of the scriptures differed from that of the scholars; and His outlook on religion created much opposition. They looked upon Him as a visionary—an unbalanced man —a man who was possessed with the devil. Some discouraged Him, others tried to persuade Him to quit His work, others sought His life. He went to the desert to think these

things over, to see if He was the man or not. To find out if He had strength to withstand the suffering which He might confront while carrying on His great mission. There were other thoughts in His mind: Can He work with high priests and elders? Can He bring out what He intends to do without worshipping His superiors?

WEDDING AT CANA

"What is it to me and to you, woman?" "Why should we worry about the wine." "La dakel etat shaat." "My turn has not come; other guests are before me who have yet to do their duty before I can instruct the servants to bring wine. I will do it when my turn comes." The gentle remarks exchanged between Mary and Jesus were partly made by speech and partly by hands and head, in order not to embarrass other guests. Mary's mind was relieved. She told the servants to watch Jesus and when His turn came, to do whatever He told them; if sent out to bring a few jars of wine, to go. "Shaat" means also time and clock. The term "woman" in Aramaic is addressed to a married woman.

Such was the picture of the wedding feast at Cana, where Mary sat with a group of women, her face wreathed in smiles, her eyes fastened on her beloved one. Her son was

the only one among the guests who had not drunk to excess. It would have been truly oriental for Mary to have wished to see her son a little drunk and active in the feast. Jesus had likely drunk a few cups just to please the bridegroom and those sitting near Him.

Mary at times chatted with the women and discussed wedding affairs and the match, all agreeing, except the mother-in-law, that the bride was a hard worker and a good bargain.

The wedding festivities were gradually subsiding; the servants were standing idle; there was no more wine. Mary, thinking that Jesus' turn to treat the guests had come, made a sign with her eyes which told Him to bring wine for the guests. "Son, order the servants to bring some wine for the guests." She spoke to Him through the motion of her lips and the gesticulating of her hands. Other men had brought wine and made the feast merry, why should not her son do the same.

She felt unhappy over the remarks of the women, servants and guests who praised so generously those who shared in making the feast a success. For a while Mary thought that her son was bashful, or that He was unfamiliar with the wedding customs, and, therefore, had not called on the servants to bring wine.

PETER (ROCK)

The word "Peter" is derived from the Aramaic word "Kepa," which means rock. Simon, the Aramaic being "Shimmon," means hearing, and is one of the most popular names among the Shemites. The name is a sacred one, given by a mother in answer to her prayer to God for a child. "God has hearkened to my voice." On the other hand, among the Aramaic-speaking people, "Kepa" (stone) has never been used for a name. All Semitic names have some religious meaning. Names such as stone, street, shoe, bridge, fox if given to an Easterner, would cause him to commit murder.

The term "kepa" is a general nickname given to stupid people and to those who ask questions and pay little attention to what has been said. Peter "Kepa" is one of the most offensive of nicknames; a sword wound inflicted on the body of an Easterner would

hurt less than the nickname "kepa" hurts the heart.

Jesus felt sorry for Simon when others teased him and called him "stone-headed." He knew how offended His countrymen were when given nicknames. He knew, moreover, that Simon did not understand easily. His rich mind was hard to cultivate, just as a field which has never been ploughed will, when cultivated, bear fruits. The joking having subsided, and Jesus finished speaking, He turned to Peter, smiling, and said, "Thou art the rock, and on this rock I will build my church." The Aramaic word for church is "eta"—group. Jesus wanted to cheer Peter, and to avoid a break between him and his partners because of his new and provoking name.

RACA

"But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be guilty to the council, and whosoever shall say, Thou effeminate one, shall be doomed to hell fire."

St. Matthew 5: 22.
(Literal translation from Aramaic)

"Raca" * in Aramaic means "to spit in one's face."

In the East, spitting in each other's face is done very frequently during the business hours and at times when persons enter into heated arguments. When a merchant and his prospective customer disagree in their bargaining, they generally spit in each other's face.

* Raca has never been translated into Greek or Latin. The translators were unable to understand its meaning.

TO HIM THAT HAS IT SHALL BE GIVEN

In Kurdistan and Assyria often a landlord divides his fields among his tenants to cultivate for him. The landlord provides the seed and equipment when necessary. In September, when the harvest is over, the wheat is divided into one-fifth for the landlord and four-fifths for his tenants. In case a tenant has not taken good care of his land and crops have been poor, the landlord takes all of the wheat his tenant has produced for his share and seed which he loaned. Then he turns the wheat and the land over to another tenant who has been more faithful and successful in cultivating the land.

THE RICH MAN

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

St. Matthew 19: 23, 24.

Jesus condemned the eastern rich men and barred them from entering into the kingdom of heaven. Because a rich man acquires his wealth not so much by his profession or hard labor as by force and graft. The rich man harvests where he has not sown seed; he gathers from where he has not reaped; and by the virtue of his wealth becomes an overlord; too holy to bear the burdens like those borne by the common people of his town. According to Eastern traditions wealth is a blessing from God showered on those He loves. Nevertheless, most Easterners would never wait for God to bless them. They bless

themselves simply by unjustly acquiring property belonging to the poor. The sooner they are blest the better it is. When God had made a man rich, "let us keep him rich," say the Easterners. On the other hand, the poor man is cursed; that is the reason why he is poor, and to help a poor man to become rich is against the will of God.

As soon as an Easterner acquires money, servants and lands, he is exempt from all local and federal taxes. Furthermore, through an oral law this rich man levies special taxes on the poor of his town whenever he pleases. When other rich men come to visit him, he kills the sheep of the poorest men in his town, to make a feast for his honorable guests.

The rich men are also beggars. They are the only ones who are permitted to collect money when their revenues fall short, or when they intend to add a few more women to their harems. Often you can see a stranger entering a certain town, accompanied by

scores of armed servants, riding on beautiful horses. He is the Eastern rich man from another town who has come to beg. On his arrival, he is met and escorted to a rich man's house, who immediately begins to collect sheep, oxen and money from the poor of his town to be given to his friend. A poor man is allowed to beg only crumbs of bread which have been left at the tables.

TAKE NO MONEY

"Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses;

"Nor scrip for your journey, neither two shirts, neither shoes, nor stave: for the workman is worthy of 'sebartha'—his food."

St. Matthew 10: 9-10.
(Literal translation from Aramaic)

In the Near East a traveling man is killed only when the bandits find money in his purse. This is done to hide the identity of the murderers in order to escape punishment. A man traveling without money has nothing to fear. If he should be in need and is met by robbers they will offer to help and let him go in peace. Some highwaymen whose hospitality exceeds their virtues would share their scanty supplies of food with travelers whom they would meet, and in return they would relieve them of their shoes, clothes or other articles which they need.

Many men would give all their wealth for the sake of having their bodies healed, for their sight to be restored, or to have their beloved ones raised from the dead. Jesus knew that His disciples, endowed with the gift of healing, would soon accumulate riches and become the prey of the bandits and highwaymen who might be tempted to kidnap them for ransom. Moreover, the division of wealth among the disciples was soon to be a problem and to stir rivalry and hatred which would weaken their ranks and impair the progress of their work.

There were also grave fears that worldly men will offer themselves in the missionary cause of the Church, because of self-interest.

Indeed, Jesus knew that the Eastern people would never welcome and believe in the teachings of those who are paid for preaching the word of God. His disciples were to be cared for by the converts. They were worthy of their food.

TAKE NO MONEY

When an employer hires a laborer, he bargains with him concerning wages and food. Customarily the Eastern people provide food for all classes of labor but in the case of a laborer who is willing to work without wages, the question of food is not raised at all by the employer. At the end the employer might also be willing to pay a small wage. In this case even workers who are not good workers often are employed just for their food. The Eastern laborer under any condition is assured of his food by his employer.

LOOKING BEHIND

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

St. Luke 9: 61-62.
(Literal translation from Aramaic)

A man who is considered an expert plougher and a good worker is one who while ploughing never looks behind. A new servant who has just been hired, is watched by his employer to see if he looks behind.

Ploughers who look behind are not considered good workers. They look behind to see how much of the field has been done in order to reckon when they will be finished. While doing this they have to stop the oxen.

A tireless plougher is one who always looks forward, determined to finish his work and only looks at the unploughed soil to see it decreasing in size.

The disciples of Jesus were not to look behind and be discouraged by the few converts which had been gained, because the work of the gospels at the outset was to progress very slowly. But they were to look forward to see the big work ahead.

DIVORCE

"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is 'shvikta' (undivorced) does commit adultery."

St. Matthew 19: 9.
(Literal translation from Aramaic)

The Aramaic word "shvikta" means "an undivorced woman." A woman whose husband has not given her divorce papers. The Aramaic for divorced is "shrita," which means the one on whom the sacred bond has loosened.

The law of Moses permitted divorces on moral and criminal grounds. Nevertheless as the statutes of women in the East are inferior to those of men, men often tire of their wives and let them go but do not bother to obtain decrees of divorce. In this case, Jesus only condemned those who took advan-

tage of the laxity of the law. He only attacked those who married women who were not actually divorced by law.

GOOD MASTER

"Malpana Tava"

"And there came one near and said unto him, 'Malpana Tava'—wonderful teacher—what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

"And he said unto him, Why do you call me wonderful? There is no one wonderful but one—God. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

St. Matthew 19: 16-18.
(Literal translation from Aramaic)

The word "tava" in this case means wonderful. If the man had meant good or holy, he would have used the word "kadisha." "Tava" is used only when describing quality, such as wonderful carpenter, wonderful shepherd, wonderful ox. A shepherd may be a criminal, but still be called "good shepherd," not because of his good character, but because the sheep follow him, and he knows how to feed them. Jesus refused to accept the honor

of the name "wonderful teacher," because an Easterner, whose teaching is from God, always tries to hide his popularity; the less he says concerning his knowledge, the more the people think of him; the more he hides himself, the more popular he becomes; but the Pharisees and scribes loved to be honored and called "wonderful rabbis."

LET THE DEAD BURY DEAD

And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father.

But Jesus said unto him, Follow me and let the dead bury their dead.

St. Matthew 8: 21, 22.

The Aramaic word for "dead" is "metta," and the word for "town" is "matta." There is a slight difference in pronunciation. In many of the mutilated manuscripts the small Aramaic character which determines the difference between the meaning of these two words is likely to be destroyed, especially in cases of carelessness in writing and because of the glassy manuscript ink used.

Jesus knew what this man meant. "Let me bury my father," if translated into English would mean: "My father is an old man, over seventy years of age. I have to support him until he dies." In the East when a man

reaches this age, he is considered dead. He has finished his work and has no more interest in life. He can no longer earn and produce. He is a burden on the family. He entrusts everything to his oldest son, his first born; the son who is to continue his posterity. He has labored and toiled with the sweat of his brow, and raised his children. Now he expects them to take care of him. One often hears Easterners say: "My father is near the grave!" "My father is at the side of the grave." This, if literally translated into English would mean, "My father is dead and is put in the coffin, and the coffin is waiting beside the grave to be lowered." But the real meaning is, "My father may die any day. My father is very old; I expect him to pass away any time." If this man's father had been dead Jesus would not have been preaching that day. Instead He would have been one of the mourners until the dead man was buried.

It seems more likely that the early copyists and translators confused the word "Matta" (town) for the word "metta" (dead) and what Jesus meant was, let the town bury the dead. This seems more reasonable because each town buries their own dead.

SAY TO NO ONE

"And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

"And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

"And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

St. Matthew 8: 2-5.

Jesus knew the psychology of the Eastern people. He knew that in those countries anything which is told secretly is published rapidly, being carried from mouth to mouth on the house tops. When a man tells his friend a secret he always says not to tell anyone. Therefore, the secret becomes public. If Jesus had told some of those men whom he healed to tell, they would have never told, because the act would not have been a secret and no

one would have been interested to discuss it! On the other hand, the law of Moses demands that every man who is healed must show himself to the priests.

TWO WOMEN GRINDING

Two women—a young girl and an old woman, sit down to grind wheat together, the young girl helps with one hand to turn the grinder and with the other she feeds the grinder. In the field two men work together—a boy and an old man. During the persecutions and wars when a town is conquered by the enemy the young girl at the house and the boy in the field are taken captive, but the old woman and old man are left.

BEARING A PITCHER OF WATER

"And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him."

St. Mark 14: 13.

In Palestine and Mesopotamia, water is only carried by women. For men to carry water would be considered effeminate, even were they suffering from thirst. However, as the women are not allowed to be employed in public places, keepers of lodging houses are obliged to hire male servants to perform this task of carrying water. It is customary in the East for relatives and friends to entertain each other when traveling. This decreases the demand for lodging houses. In some of the large cities, however, there is usually one or two public places, chiefly for native unmarried travelers and foreign merchants of a dif-

ferent creed, who are not welcome to stay over night in a family home.

Jesus instructed his disciples to follow the man who bore the pitcher of water because that was the easiest way for them to find a lodging house in a city like Jerusalem, where streets were irregularly laid out, with no names and numbers.

ELI, ELI, LMANA SABACHTHANI

"My God, My God, for this I was kept."

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lmana sabachthani.

"Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias."

Matt. 27: 45-47.

All versions of the Gospels have retained these words in the original tongue and given them a different meaning. Matthew, according to Eastern version, does not translate them, because he wrote to the people who had seen Jesus and heard Him preaching. It also seems probable that the later writers did not agree on its exact meaning when they translated them into Greek. This term even at present is only used by the Aramaic-speaking people in Assyria, the same language which the Galileans spoke at the time of our

Lord. This phrase in Aramaic means, "My God, my God, for this I was kept. (this was my destiny—I was born for this)."

Jesus did not quote the Psalms. If He had He would have said these words in Hebrew instead of Aramaic, and if He had translated them from Hebrew He would have used the Aramaic word "nashatani," which means "forsaken me," instead of the word "shabacktani," which in this case means, "kept me." Even the soldiers who stood by the cross did not understand what Jesus said in that hour of agony and suffering. They thought that He was calling on Elijah because the word Elijah in Aramaic is "Elia," which is similar to that for God, "Eli."

In those last minutes of suffering Jesus watched the crowd, which was composed of Rabbis, Priests, men and women of Jerusalem, who had come up to watch Him dying. Some insulted Him. Others spitting in His face, and others calling Him names and chal-

lenging his claim that He is a man of God but instead that he was a malefactor and sinner. Jesus only made a statement to Himself and to the friends who were also standing and hiding in the crowds near the Cross. That He was born for that hour that He may bear witness to the truth and open the way for the others who were to be crucified—that that was His destiny. That there was nothing else that could have given such a glorious victory as the Cross.

The disciples and women who were from Galilee never for a moment could have thought that Jesus said that God had forsaken Him. How could He say that when He had told His disciples that the whole world would forsake Him, even they, but that the Father would be with Him. When he told Peter that if He wished He could bring angels to fight for Him, and when He said, "Father, let it be Thy wish if I should drink this cup." These words, "Eli Eli lmana sabachtani,"

even today are used by Assyrians when they suffer and die unjustly. Instead of complaint and dissatisfaction, they leave everything to God. They believe that it is God's desire that they should pass through such experiences. This is the reason why in the East people do not commit suicide.

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE USAGE OF ARAMAIC WORDS

The reader must know how the words are used in each case.

SHAA
- Time
- Clock
- Turn

NAPHSHA
- Person
- Life
- Body
- Soul

BARNASHA
- Man
- Mankind
- Son of man
- Might happen

KAM
- To stand up
- To arise from the grave
- To become a ruler
- To arise in fortunes

ROOKHA
- Holy Ghost
- Spirit
- Wind
- Life
- Rheumatism,
- In Spirits Prophecy
- Soul

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